



Planning Data-Driven, Evidence-Based Programs for Refugees and Newcomers

Data and evidence are useful tools when planning interventions to support refugee and newcomer clients. This information can help set you up for success by supporting informed decisions about how to allocate limited resources. Without a clear understanding of how these concepts differ and where they fit into the project design cycle, however, the process of incorporating data and evidence into project design can feel overwhelming. This guide defines data and evidence and contextualizes them within the project cycle to help you make decisions about your project.

Data-Driven Vs. Evidence-Based

Data-driven projects use data to shape program design and inform decision-making throughout the project.

Evidence-based projects use existing evidence (usually research) to inform the design and implementation of a project. Though these approaches are similar, evidence-based projects rely on research or evaluation work that demonstrates that an intervention leads to positive outcomes. Data-driven projects usually draw on programmatic or publicly available data.

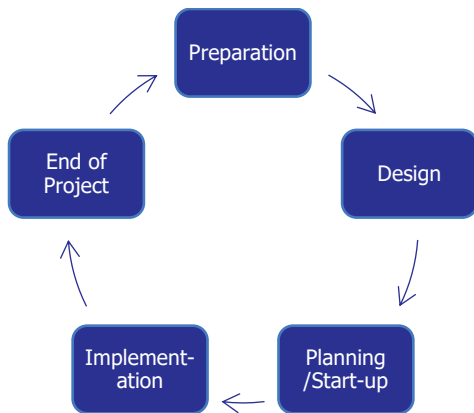
See Switchboard's [Monitoring and Evaluation \(M&E\) Glossary](#) to learn more about key project design terms.

Data refers to any observations, measurements, facts, or pieces of information that help you learn something useful about your programming. **Evidence** refers to information (usually research) that strongly supports the conclusion that an intervention leads to a particular outcome or result.

Data and Evidence in the Project Cycle

Most resettlement projects work in [cycles](#), as shown in Figure 1. Information from prior projects—or prior iterations of the same project—inform the planning and implementation of the next one. Data and evidence are important for each phase of the cycle.

Figure 1. The project cycle



Preparation

During the preparation phase of designing a data-driven, evidence-based project, you gather data and evidence that can help you understand the problem you want to address. This may include:

- **Existing evidence from academic literature or program evaluations**, which can tell you which interventions have been shown to be effective and in which context(s).
- **Data you or your team have previously collected**, such as information about client demographics, client feedback, outcome data, and staff observations and experience.
- **Publicly available data** about demographics in your area, the local job market, or any other information that would help inform your project.
- **New data you collect for this purpose**, such as a [needs assessment](#) to better understand the challenges your clients are facing.

The main aim of the preparation phase is to gather as much useful information as you can to help you make informed decisions about the design of your project.

To get started with finding and using evidence, see Switchboard's [Evidence Database](#) and collection of [Evidence](#)

Design

Once you have data and/or evidence that is relevant to the problem you want to address, you can start to design your project.

[Logic models](#) help you construct a project plan that is driven by the data and evidence you gathered during the preparation phase. Two common types of logic models are theories of change and logical frameworks, or logframes.

Start by developing a [theory of change](#) to map out how your planned intervention will reach the objective you set. For each step of your theory of change, ask:

- Do we have any evidence or prior data that suggests effective ways to address this problem?
- Do we have any data or [documented lessons learned](#) from prior projects that can help us plan around potential barriers to success?
- What did our data or evidence tell us about the population this project aims to serve? What strategies should we use to engage this population and meet their needs?
- Based on what we learned during the preparation phase, how will we know if this part of the project has been successful (i.e., what are useful metrics of success)?

Once your theory of change is in place, you can develop a [logical framework \(logframe\)](#) that helps you map out the data you will collect to assess your progress at each stage. This is not only important for reporting to funders and maintaining compliance, but also for generating data for the next project cycle and answering your team's questions about your project to inform decision-making. These are all part of a culture of iterative learning.

Planning/Start-up

The planning and start-up phase of the project cycle is when you develop your [M&E plan](#), which specifies what data you will collect, when, and how. Importantly, your M&E plan should include details about how you will use the data you collect. While you may be collecting data to report to a funder, you can also learn from that data.

Fully data-driven programs incorporate data into both design and implementation. This means that staff review data regularly throughout project implementation and use it to adjust the project, as needed. A clear M&E plan documents a plan for making data-informed decisions during the project,

including a schedule for when data will be reviewed and by whom, to support a data-driven approach. The planning and start-up phase is also a good time to establish [data quality assurance](#) processes.

Implementation

During project implementation, adhere to your M&E plan and use the data you collect to make any necessary improvements or adjustments. Your data may help answer questions such as:

- Is the project currently on track? If not, how can we catch up?
- Are we reaching the clients we planned to reach?
- Are we seeing signs that the project is achieving what we hoped it would?
- Have we encountered any unexpected barriers? If so, how can we work around them?

To make sure your data is as usable as possible, monitor data quality throughout implementation, supporting staff where needed to [keep data clean and complete](#).

End of Project

When the project comes to a close, analyze your data to draw conclusions about how successfully you implemented the project, whether you achieved the outcomes you planned, and any other important lessons you can learn.

Document your findings so you can use them during the preparation phase of the next project; this is what closes the loop of the data-driven, evidence-based program cycle. Incorporate insights and reflections from your team to add context to your findings that can shape future implementation. You can use Switchboard's [End-of-Project Learning Meeting template](#) to guide this conversation and capture lessons learned.

Navigating Capacity Challenges

When negotiating the competing demands of resettlement work, dedicating time to monitoring and evaluation can seem like a luxury. You may need to make some difficult choices about what data you can collect or how much time you can allocate to the preparation and design phases.

However, you can also take steps to foster a [culture](#) of collecting and using data within your team or organization. The advantages of employing a data-

driven, evidence-based approach to project design can help offset the initial investment of time and effort required. For example, you may be able to:

- Examine the data you are required to collect to see what questions about your project you can already answer using this information.
- Allocate limited resources in a more efficient way by prioritizing evidence-based interventions that have been shown to be most effective for clients.
- Gather staff input and ideas on how data can be used. Help team members understand the value of the data they collect or track in the context of improving programming.
- Make a strategic decision to collect additional data that will showcase your impact, which can be used to apply for future funding.

Consult [this Switchboard guide](#) for strategies to navigate data collection challenges in your work.

Conclusion

Data and evidence help you make the most of limited resources and give your project the best chance of success. The steps of the project cycle incorporate data and evidence into the design and monitoring of your project. This process can help you maintain compliance, assess your effectiveness, reflect positive outcomes to staff, and generate lessons learned for future projects.

Resources

[Are Your Programs and Services Evidence-Based? Implementation Science can Help!](#) This Switchboard blog post offers additional guidance for adopting evidence-based practices in your work.

[Collecting and Analyzing Data for Learning and Program Improvement](#) This Switchboard guide provides tips for making the most of the data you collect.

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